was sure now that she could have no doubt that we had met before, and her confidence almost convinced me. We found an attractive little place with imitation vines running up the walls and wicker chairs and tables. Only a few of the tables were taken, and we secured one in a corner.

She took off her coat,—the reddish-brown coat that matched her hair,—and in the thin, dainty waist she looked prettier than ever. Then she took off her gloves, and I saw that she wore no rings. Funny, how a man looks at a girl's left hand the first chance he gets!

If I shut my eyes now I can still call up the mental picture of her hands fluttering among the tea-things—small, white, slender, with pretty pink nails. But I never evoke that picture because of the one that always follows and blots it out—the vision of those hands as I was destined to see them next, helplessly stretched out to me in hand-cuffs. God knew his purpose, I reckon, when he veiled the future from our eyes.

THE conversation lagged at first. I was afraid to be anything but impersonal, lest I should say something to start her wondering if she did know me, after all. Then I suddenly saw the folly of the thing. There would have to be an understanding between us sometime. I could not go to her home the next day, even if I found out where she lived, unless I were absolutely sure she had not mistaken me for some one else. The sandwiches were disappearing. In a few minutes the tea-party would be over, leaving me as far as ever from the chance of future acquaintance. I took a long breath and plunged.

"Miss Hoyt," I said, "I'm going to confess. I know we've met before, but for the life of me I can't remember where."

She gave a short, startled laugh, and stared at me.

"Why—why, we met on the steamer coming from Europe—didn't we?" she faltered after a pause.

I shook my head. "I've never been to Europe."

"Oh!" It was an exclamation of dismay, and she sank back in her seat, her hands meeting in a frightened movement against her breast.

"You seemed so sure about me that I thought we must have met before," I began, defending myself against the reproach in her eyes. "Besides, your name seemed so familiar."

"Oh!" she said again—but with a quite different inflection; and she sat up straight and looked hard at me. And then she added a remark that did not strike me as odd until I had occasion to recall it later. "So it was the name!"

"Yes; I felt sure I had heard it before, and—"

"I dare say," she interrupted a trifle sharply. "Most people have—if they read the papers."

"The papers?" I echoed blankly.

"The newspapers."

I stared at her. "Who—who are you?"

"Ask the first policeman you meet," she answered. "Ask the waitress there."

As she mentioned the waitress she involuntarily turned toward the young woman who had served us and who now stood across the room idly watching us.

"Did you ever see such eyes as that woman has? They bore into you like gimlets."

"I didn't notice," I replied.

I had not, then; my eyes and attention had been focused elsewhere. An idea had flashed into my mind, and now at the first opportunity I blurted out the question: "Are you an actress?" It was the only explanation I could think of for what she had said about the newspapers.

She laughed. "Ask a policeman," she repeated teasingly—"if you are interested."

"Of course I'm interested."

"Well, so am I; but you seem to forget that you owe me an explanation and an apology."

"I have explained, and I don't think I do owe you an apology," was my reply. "I made an honest mistake, just as you did, and I'm sorry—" Breaking off, I corrected myself: "No, I'm not, because if I had not made the mistake I should have missed the pleasure of having tea with you. But, of course, I'll be sorry—if you insist."

She laughed again. She was adorably pretty when she laughed. "No, I won't insist, Mr.——" She stopped short. "I don't know your name," she stammered, as if the embarrassing fact had just dawned on her.

"My name is Richard Terrill. I'm from Atlanta, Georgia, a lawyer in New York on business, and I'm stopping at the Cecil Ho—"

I was cut off by the sudden appearance from behind me of the waitress bringing a fresh pitcher of hot water, and I had the uncomfortable feeling that she had overheard me and must think it odd that I found it necessary to tell the young girl with whom I was taking tea what my name was. But, whatever her thoughts were, her lean, sallow face did not betray them. She asked if we wanted anything else, and, being told we did not, she again retired out of ear-shot to the opposite side of the room, where she stood as before, watching us. I knew she watched now, because I glanced over several times, always to find her small, keen black eyes leveled on my guest.

The latter had poured the hot water into the tea-pot, and now refilled the cups.

"Of course, it's very shocking for a girl to go to tea with a man who has not been introduced," she observed. "Still, it's really not a reason for wasting the tea, is it?"

"Certainly not!"

She laughed, and it struck me that her laugh had changed. It was freer, gayer. Indeed, she was in high spirits, and so was I. Since I had spoken out and cleared the air, we were getting on famously. We talked along for a while, saying nothing that I recall, until she remarked suddenly:

"If you were to relate this experience to any one who knows me, do you know what you'd be told? People would shrug their shoulders and say: 'If that isn't Bobbie Hoyt all over!'"

"I see. You're in the habit of shocking the community. Is that why you're so well known to the police?"

She regarded me quizzically. "Don't you honestly remember where you heard of me before?"

"Haven't an idea."

"I wonder, now."

"You mean you don't believe me?"

"I don't know. Will you come to tea to-morrow?"

"Nothing could keep me away."

Her answer was a short, odd laugh. "The address is 16 East 80th Street. You'd better write it down," she advised.

"I sha'n't forget it."

She wanted to know the time, and I showed her my watch. It was ten minutes to five.

"Dear me, I'm late!" she exclaimed, rising. "I'll have to take a taxi."

We had the luck to pick up a cab just as we reached the corner of Fifth Avenue. I helped her in and gave her address to the chauffeur.

"Remember," she called back to me as the cab got into motion. "You are free to look me up before you come to-morrow. You'll find a policeman at any corner."

I nodded, grinning, and returned her gay wave of farewell. Then I stood on the curb and watched the receding cab until it was lost in the stream of traffic.

AS it was nearly five o'clock, I decided to telephone Talbot Sands and find out if he would dine with me. Looking round for a telephone sign, I remembered noticing a booth in the tea-room, and went back there. I was surprised as I entered to have the sharp-eyed waitress come hurrying to meet me.

"You came back for the vanity-box, didn't you?" she inquired.

"What?" I returned, not understanding.

"Your friend dropped it; I found it under the table." She was feeling in her apron pocket for something, and added: "I thought you'd be coming back for it."

I looked at the object she held out to me. It appeared to be a good-sized gold locket. "Are you sure it's hers?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, sir; I noticed her wearing it when she took her coat off. It was hanging on a gold chain and must have come loose."

Since the woman was so positive about the ownership, I took the locket, gave her some money, and went on to the telephone booth. And there, while waiting for Tal to get on the wire, I examined the ornament.

It was an odd, pear-shaped affair in dull gold, attractive for its quaintness, but of small intrinsic value. On the lid was a crudely executed device of an armored knight on a horse, charging a grotesque dragon whose tail dwindled gracefully into the small end of the pear. Below were the words, in archaic French lettering, considerably worn, but decipherable: "*Pour la croix et toi*" (For the cross and thee).

Remembering that the waitress had called the thing a vanity-box, I concluded that she had opened it, and that, since it contained no photograph or other secret matter such as lockets are supposed to, it would do no harm to take a peep myself. I found the lid lined with a mirror, and in the shallow bowl a tiny puff which, being raised, brought with it a fragrant cloud of pink powder.

I stood there with the puff between two clumsy fingers, fascinated by the dainty femininity of it, when suddenly Tal's deep tones rumbled in the receiver, and I snapped the locket shut as guiltily as if his amused eyes had been on me.

He would not have time for dinner with me, he said, poor wage-slave that he was. He was rushed with work, and had, among other unpleasant duties, to make the 6:45 train to Riverton, New York, to interview somebody. Would I go along? We could probably beat it back to Broadway in time to see a little life before midnight. I said I would meet him at the train.

I WALKED back to the Cecil, and, thinking Miss Hoyt had by then had ample time to reach home, I decided to call her up and tell her that her lost property was in my possession, and that I would send it up to her at once or bring it myself the following afternoon, as she preferred. Looking through the list of Hoyts in the telephone book, I was surprised to find her own name: "Miss Roberta Hoyt, 16 East 80th Street." Her own telephone! It struck me as odd for a young girl. Who was she?

I called the number, and a man's voice, a servant's probably, answered me.

"Is Miss Hoyt there?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; but she can not come to the 'phone. She's ill, sir."

"Ill!"

"Yes, sir. Any message, sir?"

"It's Miss Hoyt I want—Miss Roberta Hoyt," I repeated, thinking he had misunderstood the name. "Is that her home?"

"This is Miss Roberta Hoyt's home, sir, but she is ill. Any message?"

Astonished, I did not at once reply; then I began tentatively: "Why—no—" And instantly I heard a click; the man had rung off.

What could it mean? She must have been taken ill suddenly on her return home. It was now twenty minutes past five. Less than half an hour ago she had been perfectly well, and now she was ill. I wished I had asked the servant a question or two. Still, if she had been taken ill very suddenly, would he not have said so without being asked?

A possible explanation occurred to me. Perhaps she had discovered the loss of her vanity-box, had learned by telephoning to the tea-room that I had it, and, thinking I might call her up and not wishing to speak to me for fear of betraying to some one her afternoon escapade, had told the servant to say she was ill to any one who called. The theory was not entirely plausible, but I could think of no other.

Roberta Hoyt? I sounded the name again and again for a familiar ring. Had her remark about the newspapers been a jest? Very likely. I did not believe she was an actress; yet in what way could a girl as young as she become so well known? But was she well known? The waitress had watched her intently; yet, if she had known her name, would she not have mentioned it in returning the locket to me? Still, it was not her face, but her name, that she had said was known to newspaper readers. Roberta Hoyt! Where could I have seen it?

I gave up wondering after a while. Whoever she was, she was thoroughbred. Her speech and manner proved that. As for that jest about the policeman—well!

On my way to the restaurant for dinner, an idea popped into my head. Why not have dinner at that tea-room? If Miss Hoyt had called up about the locket the waitress would be sure to tell me.

The place was filled, and at first I could not find the waitress who had served our tea. Suddenly, however, she appeared at my elbow.

"Your friend came back for her vanity-box—but I guess you know," she said.

"Came back—here?"

"Oh, didn't you know? She said she guessed you'd call her up. I told her I found it and gave it to you, and she said that was all right."

"Why—when was this?" I questioned, trying to conceal my wonder.

"About half-past five."

Half-past five! At twenty minutes past I had been told she was too ill to come to the 'phone.

"Are you sure of the time?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, because an extra waitress who comes on at half-past five to help with dinner came in when we were talking."

"I see," I said, feeling her black eyes curiously watching me. "That was how I missed her. I called her up and—missed her."

"Well, she was awful glad I'd found the vanity-box and wanted to give me something for it, but I told her you had already done that."

She paused, and I had the sense that something was expected of me. I glanced up. Shrewdness was written large in every line of her thin, unprepossessing face. Unlikely, I thought, that she had refused money from any one. Evidently it was money she expected now.

"I knew you'd like to know she'd been back—if you hadn't heard from her," she remarked.

I nodded shortly, handed her a coin, and left.

My theory was exploded; I was utterly at sea. For, since Miss Hoyt had not known at the time I 'phoned her house that I had the locket, she could not have ordered her servant to say she was ill for any reason connected with the locket or me. The idea occurred to me to call her up again. She had told the waitress she expected me to call. Perhaps now she would answer and explain. But, consulting my watch, I found I had barely time to make the train for Riverton, and was forced to let the 'phoning go until later.

TAL was waiting for me, and we were soon on our way. His mission, he explained, was to interview a stodgy old gink named Martin, who had a place near Riverton, was a stock-holder in the *Record*, and periodically divulged his political opinions to an inattentive world. The assignment was a chore, and Tal grumbled all the way, which proves that we never recognize good fortune when we stare it in the face.

We got an automobile at the station, and went straight to the Martin home—the show place of the neighborhood, our driver told us. And it is a fine place, but the only features of it that I recall distinctly are the two big lamps at the gate. However, it was not the lamps themselves but the objects their light revealed to us that night which have kept their memory green.

Tal suggested introducing me as a fellow reporter, so that I should not have to wait; but I preferred, I said, to take a spin round the village and return for him.

"Go back to the station," I ordered the chauffeur, as we swung down the drive to the lodge.

At the station I found a telephone booth and called Miss Hoyt's home. After some